

FROM THE FARM TO THE FAST MAIL

By JASPER HUNNICUTT, R. P. C.

Jimponhurst was moved from center to circumference, or rather from the postoffice to the duck pond in one direction and to the woods in the other.

Leafy, sleepy old Jimponhurst never had moved much, and its inhabitants did not believe in motion. But my appointment as railway mail clerk created a visible sensation. I became famous at once. All eyes followed me. All fingers indexed me. Greatness was thrust upon me. It was intensely gratifying and extremely novel. To me, a simple, my ambition ignominiously had been checked by poverty. I was a farmer, not for pleasure and apparently not for profit.

By some strange faculty of humor others had always enjoyed my poverty. As a child I marveled that my schoolmates should smile and remark that I was awfully "poor" and had nothing but snow balls in my dinner pail. They remarked, too, that I was such a graceful "slinger" when all the others had skates. They also loved to state in the school newspaper, read on Friday afternoon, that my folks had postponed our trip to Florida on account of business complications. Then a titter would go around the schoolroom. But as the sarcasm pierced my little soul there was one tiny girl who always rose up at her desk and looked at me sympathetically. She had a habit of rising and sitting down again very quickly in school, apparently to adjust her little skirts, but really to glance around the room. Her name was Stella and her eyes justified the name. Lucky stars they were too, and they followed me with grateful favor as I grew up to be a young man. I might add in regard to her that she grew up, too, and became a young woman.

At last there came a certain day in June. Across the field I followed a plow. Stella came in view along the pike and stopped to wait my slow approach. She waited long, as the harness broke twice or thrice before I stood beside her in the road, and my team was eating the top rail of the fence. Stella only laughed at the delay and the stars were luminous.

"Jasper," she said, "what is the extent of your information concerning the Civil Service Commission?"

"It is very limited," I replied, greatly amazed.

"You are so delightfully dull," she continued, "but listen and learn. You are discouraged farming this land, which is too poor on which to raise a disturbance. Uncle Sam has many good positions to be filled by competitive examination. I'll venture you do not even know how to apply for one."

I confessed the most blissful ignorance and offered to become her regular pupil ever afterward. She declined the great responsibility and continued earnestly, "A letter to the Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C., asking for instructions, is the first step. State what branch of service you desire to enter. The reply will inform you how to gain admission to an examination. Those who pass with high grade are given appointments. You can do it and become the hero of Jimponhurst. The railway mail service would suit you. It is such nice clean work, sorting letters as you fly along and tossing out bags of mail as you go. There is really no labor about it."

I obtained the blanks as Stella had indicated and returned them, filled up, to the commission. I then began preparation for examination, especially in railroad geography. Stella prepared many questions for me from maps or folders given me by the ticket agent. "On what lines would you travel from Dubuque, Ia., to Richmond, Va.?" "From Detroit, Mich., to Little Rock, Ark.?" "From Memphis, Tenn., to Erie, Pa.?" "From Pittsburgh, Pa., to Cairo, Ill.?" and two hundred more. The tangled net of the map developed after a few weeks' study, and I went in confidence to the examination. To my discouragement, 150 other young men appeared, many of them highly educated. Several of them, however, walked out in despair when confronted by the questions in railroad geography. Nothing difficult was required in the other branches, such as mathematics, composition, copying, common geography and abbreviations. Many failed on the reading test, consisting of fifty indifferently addressed envelopes to be read in ten minutes. I came home and kept my own counsel and Stella's. In two months the commission informed me that I had passed with a general average of 92.4 per cent. Soon after I received notice of being placed on the list of certified substitute clerks to await my turn for regular appointment and to perform service meanwhile if required in place of other clerks.

And now I was truly a hero at Jimponhurst. These were golden days, but the end came soon. On that last evening before entering my official career a reception was given me in the church. A banner wrought in cedar stated that "Jimponhurst honors her most famous son." As the people passed by I shook hands with every one and kissed all the little girls. My pulse beat high with pride, but I fear it will never reach that point again. Suddenly there was a commotion. A messenger appeared with a telegram. A telegram in Jimponhurst usually told of a calamity, and all stood breathless as I read it aloud. "Indianapolis, Nov. 17, 4 p. m. Jasper Hunnicutt, report at this office for duty at once." It was signed by an official called a chief clerk, who has authority over a number of railroad lines. I left home that night amid cheers that re-echoed from the woods standing like a wall of darkness back of the town. Upon arrival at the capital city next morning I took a cab and drove to the government building, in order to make a good impression upon the officials. I hope now that no one saw me. Finding the chief clerk's office, I began to deliver to the stenographer a little introductory speech. But when I had arrived at "I am Jasper Hunnicutt, a humble citizen of Jimponhurst," he said that was enough. Then springing up, he shook my hand cordially and introduced me to all. There was a number of men in the room looking over maps, diagrams and lists, and an abundance of correspondence on the desks. One man leaned over a list of names, making notes and repeating abstractedly, "Jennings, take Thorn's run on 8; Dudley on 6 for Weeks; double Dudley 21st; Bailey's baby sick; send Smith a day ahead; Barnes broke arm; shove Stevens up; my friend Jones as acting clerk." This problem being solved, he took me in charge, gave me a reading test and some instructions and dismissed me to report for duty to an early train next day.

The afternoon was spent visiting the monument, the Capitol, the yellow bridge and other noted places, and the next morning I went to the station in high spirits. As the long train rolled in from St. Louis I followed eleven other clerks who climbed hastily into the mail cars. Every one but me knew exactly what to do and did it with celebrity. First a dozen valises opened and numerous books, schemes, schedules, lists, labels, pencils, knives and other articles were produced. With dexterous fingers some began to place little printed slips of paper in boxes of the three hundred pigeon-hole letter boxes at one end of the car. Near by, in an ingenious rack of iron rods, were forty large leather pouches, fastened by hooks, with their mouths open. Each

pouch was marked with a folded paper label showing its origin and destination. A similar rack twenty-five feet long occupied each side of the middle portion of the car, with an aisle and a long table between. In this rack hung many large canvas sacks for paper mail, and the open mouths of these were labeled by nimble fingers. Big sacks of paper and heavy pouches of letters were thrown in and our journey to Pittsburg began. "Jasper," said the clerk in charge, "don't try to unlock the sacks of papers. Only the leather pouches are looked. You face up." I had been vainly seeking the keyhole of a tie sack, but now began to place packages of letters in rows on the table, all with address turned in the same direction. Some clerks, taking them up by armfuls, threw the bundles with precision into the leather pouches or piled them on the table in front of the letter case. Others began to distribute these letters around in the pigeon holes with mysterious rapidity. Still others emptied enormous sacks of paper mail on the tables and began vigorously throwing newspapers into the canvas sacks in that portion of the car. It was a novel sight to see the papers pour over the open canvas mouths and disappear in the right place, here and there. Papers were constantly in the air, each one hastening to its respective place. Other clerks piled and replied stalls of mail in the other end of the car, but why I could not understand, as all sacks looked alike to me. There were two mail cars on the train, connected by a vestibule, and the same busy scene was enacted in both. It was weird looking enough to me under the lamplight, and the bustle around me and the swift, easy motion of the train thrilled me with pleasurable excitement. The morning passed swiftly as we rushed through town after town. I was given the easy assignment of distributing mixed papers, but soon realized my inability to move fast enough. "Poor fellow, he's stuck," sighed the clerk in charge, very audibly. "Come here, Burnside, and help him. Teach him your catlike movement." The men smiled and I gazed at the retreating landscape with thoughts of home.

The clerk who smiled the "local work." By certain landmarks he knew exactly our approach to every station, and at the right moment, going to the door, raised the catch-er. With a startling whack the suspended sack came into the iron hook and was taken into the car. With rapid fingers each sack was opened, the mail distributed and another sack made ready for the next station. I presently longed for my noon hour of rest, but this does not come on a mail car. As the sun declined we were sweeping around the graceful curves of western Pennsylvania. The scenery was charming and as we rocked gently around the grassy hills new prospects came before us unceasingly. All hands were called to "look out" and we drew near our journey's end. At last we came swiftly out of a deep gorge and I saw in long lines of changing perspective the lights of Allegheny and Pittsburg. It is a magnificent sight, worth a long journey to see. Descending gradually, we rolled along the opposite bank of the river for miles, and there crossing over, dived under the town to the station. We gave way to another set of clerks, whose run is between Pittsburg and New York city. They came hurrying on board as I stepped off, weary, bewildered and with my self-confidence all gone. I retired to bed, but in my dreams letters and papers constantly piled up around me while I vainly strove to put them in their proper places.

Next morning our crew was at the station early, and twelve jollier men were never seen, myself excepted. "Jasper," said Burnside, "have you made a requisition to the department for your rubber suit? It will be handy when your turn comes to wash the mail sacks. They haven't been laundered for some time." "Boys," said the clerk in charge, "you know what a time we had with Burnside on his first trip? He kept jerking the wrappers off the papers and it was seen that he was trying to hush the mail. Thought it was corn, probably." Just then an Irish baggageman shouted, "Shake on the hills! Every clerk grabbed his valise and walked hastily down the train shed as into the other end came the stately procession of mail cars from Jersey City. Like men storming a fort we rushed on board before the train had stopped. It was bewildering to see so much mail. Standing in the front car I could look back through six postal cars, piled to the roof on each side with mail. Along this aisle, 400 feet in length, mail by the ton and scores of tons was stacked like a wall on either hand. I never had dreamed of such a sight. Yet, daily west from Pittsburg on the Pennsylvania lines go trains loaded with mail. For a while it seemed that confusion reigned. Numberless sacks of mail were thrown out and in the cars. A perspiring swarm of men tossed and rolled sacks here and there, but all was mystery to me. The stopping time of this great moving postoffice, on its way from New York to St. Louis, soon passed. The inspector "trimmed" the cars and ascertained that the heavy load was properly balanced. The inquiry was passed from car to car, "Are you all right there?" The station men hurried off and we were on our long journey westward. The side doors were blocked with mail, which we now, by great labor, dragged into stalls. The aisles were strewn with mail. "To me, chaos appeared complete. It seemed impossible that every sack and letter or paper should go directly to its destination, near or far. Through the tunnel and over the barge-laden river we hastened, and soon were flying along the stream under the lofty gray cliffs. The engine mottled and raged as if animated by a furious desire and conscious of its valuable burden. Soon we turned westward through sunny valleys. Skillful hands had restored order in the cars. Letters were swiftly finding their way into the cases. Paper mail soared above the office of canvas mouths. I was of course helpless. Two of us were assigned to distribute Kansas papers and together we soon had a long rack hung with sacks. Each open sack's mouth was labeled to show what mail should be placed therein. Burnside was again my partner, and I remarked to him that it would take me a month to distribute everything about Kansas papers. He laughed and suggested that I telegraph good-bye to my friends and go out West with the mail. Burnside was kind, but not given to flattery. "See that dose of Kansas," he said, "and you don't know a thing. But we'll coax a few papers into the sacks." We had a sack hung in the rack for every railroad in Kansas and one for each of the large towns. The latter were called direct, and I could throw the mail into them. The other sacks were called routes and, of course, I had not learned upon what routes the 1,673 post-offices of Kansas were situated. But Burnside knew, and, glowing and perspiring, he threw papers right and left. His tongue seemed to wag independently and he freely gave me advice as we went along. "Don't be afraid of moving too fast, Jasper. If you set the car on fire I'll throw water on you. There, let loose of 'em. Make 'em hum as they go into the sack. Never mind the scenery outside. Roll up another bale. Pahaw, that sack has a thousand pieces in it. Let's resign right off. Don't be nervous, Jasper, because we are going seventy miles an hour. No danger of any-

thing running into the rear of the train now. I'll tell you it's safer than riding in a buggy. The Pennsylvania Company builds scientific tracks and the wheels can't get off. Signals far ahead tell if the track is clear. The wheels can't turn too fast for me." It was too fast for me, however, and my limbs shook as we seemed to be flying through the air. Yet there was a fascination about it. I love to hear the tornado roar in the smoketank of an engine driven at high speed. The active movements of the clerks made me forget weariness. The clerk in charge examined the mail in every car and then telegraphed for extra help on Kansas papers. Further along these men came on board, not well pleased with the extra duty without extra pay. At various brief stopping points the hungry clerks leaped off and, after jostling and chaffing one another a few moments over the lunch counter, returned quickly to work. Every moment was valuable. It was to be a great struggle to complete the distribution and every one felt the pressure. Clerks deadheaded over the road were ordered on duty, until a score of men were in the conflict.

I was presently detailed to assist the local clerk, who was overwhelmed with business in another car. Here extremely active work was required, as mail was thrown off and received at every station as we dashed along. I heartily wished the train would pause and give us more time, but it seemed to grow more fleet. It was a fine Indian summer day. Out of the open doors on each side of the car I could see the corn shocks, fences and trees flashing past with incredible speed. Yet so smoothly we rode that one might imagine we stood still while the earth revolved beneath us. Presently the clerk in charge said, "Jasper, make a catch here. Take that pouch and hold up the catcher." I obeyed with trembling hands. "Throw off at the crossing." I saw suspended far ahead a pouch of mail. In another moment this pouch came with a crash into the iron hook I was holding. I fell on my knees from the shock and in my fright threw off the other pouch half a mile past the station. "Hurry up now; get that lock off," said the clerk in charge. In quivering haste I unlocked the sack just caught. The mail was quickly distributed and another sack I dodged back as the whistle sounded for the next station. "Mind your signal. Get to the door, man. Throw sack east of the flower bed," yelled the clerk in charge again. Peering timidly out the side of the car I saw the big wheels of the engine revolving like electric fans and the station seemed to come toward us with tremendous haste. I dodged back as the sack struck the catcher and then threw the outgoing mail on the flower bed, wrecking it completely. "Quick now; the next station is close by." The sack was snatched from my hands and another one made ready in a jiffy. I had become very nervous. We were running along like a tornado, though smoothly as a bicycle. The fallen leaves in a great bevy rose up and followed us and the holyhooks on the banks waved and tossed. The engineer seemed like such a tiny mite to govern the monster of steel and iron he rode upon. I could see his sleeves fluttering in the wind, a mere insect compared with the steel whose fierce energy he controlled. "Deliver at the east end of the platform." The east end was too near the west end for my unskilful hands and the heavy mail sack liberated four dozen fowls that were encooped at that point. This I afterwards had to explain in writing. Crash came in the heavy mail sack from this town filled with copies of a rural paper. We were soon bearing down on the next town. "Quick now, Jasper; don't get excited. Be awful careful and deliver on the second street." I tried to hurry, but my limbs shook and my hands were half paralyzed. I longed for slower traveling, but we now flew over the ground like an arrow. The eye could scarce catch the glimpses of passing objects. The exhaust hummed in the chimney with terrific energy. "Get to the door, Jasper. Watch out." The engine bellowed like a mad fiend and we rushed into the town as though bent on destruction. I could not possibly see where to deliver the mail in the confused perspective of houses, streets, freight cars, wagons, horses and people. Alas! I made an unlucky throw. The mail bag entered the window of a humble residence, and, striking a table on which a meal was placed, swept everything before it. I learned this later and was required to pay \$5 for the dishes and \$2 for breaking a boy's arm. This was my last catch that day, for which the public should be grateful. I gladly resumed carrying 200-pound sacks of mail to the paper clerks. Our crew successfully won the battle, but not until the lights of Indianapolis were in sight did we have the mail distributed, "tied up" and piled. Then everybody relaxed into a social mood and we stepped off at the end of our journey grimy and soiled, but laughing over the hardships of the day. I caught a train going toward Jimponhurst and slipped into the village next morning by a back alley. I wouldn't have met Stella then for \$50.

An Autumn Idyl.
(Very small Indiana maidens burying themselves in dead leaves.)
Lissome, airy wood nymphs hand round the cup
Where life's freshest nectar foams and bubbles up
In your tiny beings, linger, if you please;
Let your poet quaff it freely at his ease.
Sure your pranks presenting miracles of form
Decking you, sweet atomies must fright the hordes of storm,
So merrily you're pelting Death with his own sheaves,
Radiantly peering from your graves of withered leaves.
Let the soul of nature feel your gay caresses;
Wisdom's self, beholding, softens and confesses
That the joy of living sounds its keenest note,
Thrusting deep conviction down Time's dusky throat.
When your tender beings, gracious seraphim,
Mock life's coming storm-cloud, flitting round its him,
Though the wreck of nature happens once a year
Wreathing all its ruins angel forms appear.
Richmond, Ind. —Carmen Reed.

Cecil Rhodes's Ideal.
Review of Reviews.
Mr. Rhodes had no hesitation in arriving at the conclusion that the English race—the English-speaking man, whether British, American or South African—is the type of the race which does now, and is likely to continue to do in the future, the most effective and just thing for the world, to promote liberty and to insure peace over the widest possible area of the planet.
"Therefore," said Mr. Rhodes to himself in his curious way, "if there be a God, and He cares anything about what I do, it is clear that He would like me to do what He is doing himself. And as He is manifestly fashioning the English-speaking race as the chosen instrument by which He will bring in a state of society based upon justice, liberty and affection, I must, of course, do what I can to give as much hope and power to that race as possible. Hence," so he concludes this long argument—"if there be a God, I think that what He would like me to do is to paint as much of the map of Africa British red as possible, and to do what I can elsewhere to promote the unity and extend the influence of the English-speaking race."

Mr. Rhodes had found his longed-for ideal, nor has he ever since then had reason to complain that it was not sufficiently elevated or sufficiently noble to be worth the devotion of his whole life.

Tastes Differ.
Atechison Globe.
A vagrant dog, particularly a cur with seven or eight different strains of common dog in him, is the best kind of a dog to own. He is always smiling and wagging his tail at you, and his expression of little favors is only equalled by his appetite. A fancy dog with a blue ribbon around his neck is just for an eye-looker to snap at children. If we kept a dog, we would keep a yellow one, purchased as a pup from a negro boy. The best cur dogs are owned by negroes.

Rocker Sale ALL WEEK



Solid Oak Rocker (like cut), full leather seat. Sale Price,

\$1.55



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Rocker Sale ALL WEEK



Quartered oak, polish finish. Sale Price,

\$1.98

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Every day brings a new quotation on Furniture. There is no doubt of a very sharp advance before long. Luckily for you the floors and warehouses have been crowded with fine **HOLIDAY FURNITURE** at the old prices. You are welcome to buy these

Without Any Advance in Prices

Bookcases



Hundreds of this useful Holiday Present. This case—Solid Oak, Golden Finish,

\$10.75

RECEPTION CHAIRS

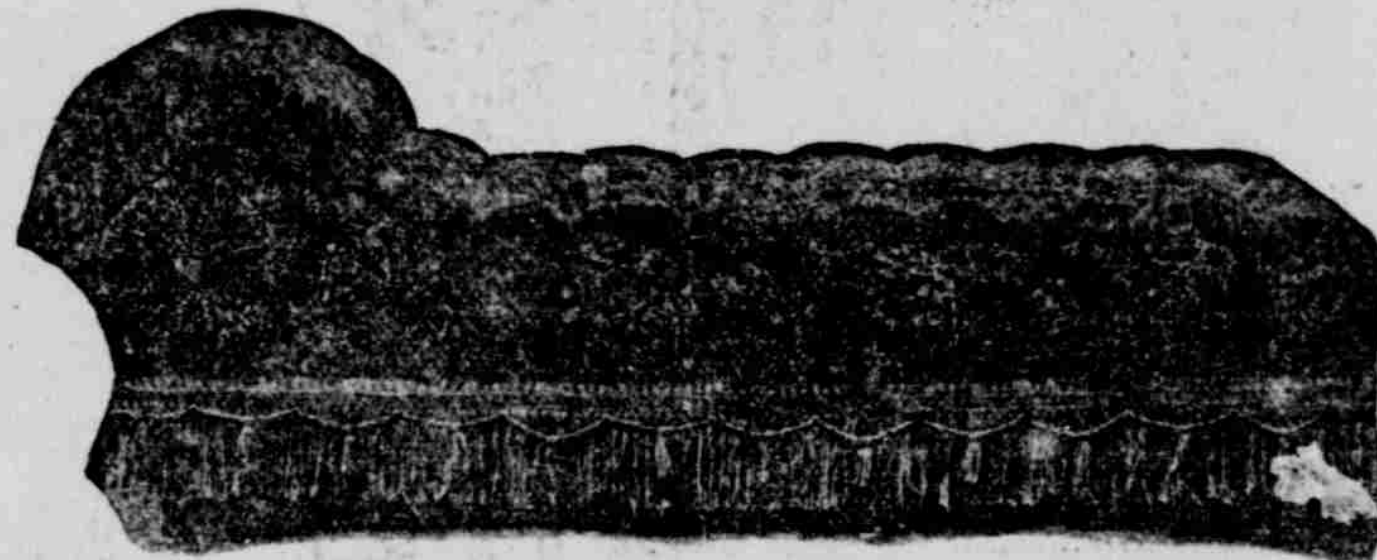
Special Prices all week.



This Oak or Mahogany Finish Chair,

\$3.50

COUCHES



Upholstered in Kiser Plush, full springs, all desirable colors. A genuine Couch Bargain—large size—

\$6.75

MONDAY

KITCHEN TABLE SALE

Kitchen Table, 24 by 36-inch top..... 75c

Kitchen Table, 28 by 54-inch top..... \$1.10

Kitchen Table, 30 by 48-inch top, with breadboard..... \$1.25

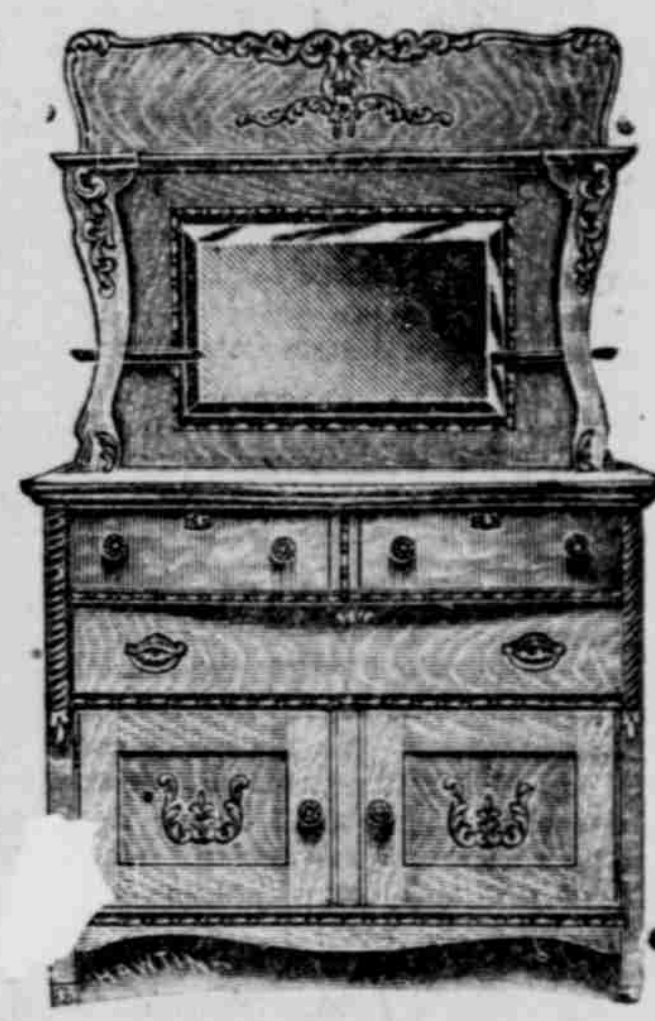
CARPETS...RUGS

100 Smyrna Rugs, Size 24 by 56 inches..... \$1.35

50 Royal Wilton Rugs, Size 27 by 60 inches..... \$2.69

20 Rolls Best all-Wool Ingrains, 45c A yard.....

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Special low prices this week on these goods. This solid Oak Sideboard, polish finish, each,

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This Revolving Office Chair, wood seat, each,

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Sideboards, China Closets, Dinner Sets, Tables, Chairs.

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